

## Iowa Legends of Buried Treasure

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*Iowa Legends of Buried Treasure*, by Charlton Grant Laird, edited by Stephen K. Hutchinson. Lincoln: Foundation Books, 1990. xiv, 173 pp. Illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$8.95 paper.

REVIEWED BY BRUCE MOORE STILLIANS, UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII

Charlton Grant Laird had an important career as an educator and writer. His work was substantial enough to be included in Frank Paluka's *Iowa Authors: A Bio-Bibliography of Sixty Native Writers*, published in 1967. After that he wrote more than a half-dozen engaging and important works on language. In 1987 Laird was honored with a collection of essays: *The Legacy of Language: a Tribute to Charlton Laird*, edited by Phillip C. Boardman.

It doesn't seem quite right, then, to publish posthumously Laird's master's thesis of 1927 that seemed when it was written to be an academic afterthought. Laird collected three-fourths of the legends in "personal interviews." And the "Iowa Legends of Buried Treasure" are in part from feature articles Laird gathered for *Wallaces' Farmer*. The material was solicited with a contest: "Keep in mind, too, that the treasure didn't really have to exist for it to provide a good story. If the neighborhood thought there was treasure, and folks spent a lot of time digging for it, we will like the account just as well as if somebody did dig up a thousand dollars." Laird added an appendix with some 89 footnotes, almost one to a sentence, a feat that presumably gave academic probity to the journalistic exercise. That appendix seems curiously unrelated to the "legends."

The editorial practices in the book lack care. In combining footnotes, the editor left 162 footnote references in the text, a number not matched by the 161 in the end notes. One presumes Professor Laird would not condone the "Aknowlegments [*sic*]" in the editor's preface or, in that same text, the reference to "dialectic passages" when, evidently, "dialect passages" was meant. All of this might be redeemed if the book were entertaining. But it is not very good reading.

A footnote to another Iowa legend of buried gold. It is difficult to understand how Laird missed a case in Taylor County, called by the *Villisca Review* the "most dramatic action in the history of Iowa jurisprudence." In 1915 Attorney-General George Cosson brought an indictment against four men accused by an "eye-witness" of a murder in 1868 involving \$90,000 in gold, gold purported still to be buried in Taylor County. New York, Chicago, Kansas City, and Des Moines dailies covered the story. "Cosson's folly" was dismissed. The story of the gold persists.

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